

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Family Planning and Family Vision in Mothers After Diagnosis of a Child With Autism Spectrum Disorder

Navot, N., Jorgenson, A. G., Stoep, A. V., Toth, K., & Webb, S. J. (2016). Family planning and family vision in mothers after diagnosis of a child with autism spectrum disorder. *Autism, 20*(5), 605-615. doi:10.1177/1362361315602134

SUMMARY: A child being diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) can involve a lot of changes to family planning for parents. Mothers of first-born children diagnosed with ASD were interviewed about their experiences regarding initial family planning, adapting to their child's diagnosis, and family planning following the diagnosis. Important factors to adapting and planning following an ASD diagnosis include coherence of the initial plan, planning flexibility, and feelings of support and competence.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Mothers who adapted well to their child's diagnosis tended to focus on the present and positive moments, feel competent about their parenting, and feel supported by others.
- Mothers who adapted poorly to their child's diagnosis tended to focus on guilt or blame, feel fear and confusion about the future, and feel isolated from others.
- Mothers who decided to have additional children, compared to those who did not, adapted more positively to their child's diagnosis, had more flexible views of family planning, and had more coherent ideas about how their family of origin impacted their planning and values.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Develop online information and resources for military families with a child diagnosed with ASD
- Collaborate with military parenting programs to make community counseling focused on family planning available to military families

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer military parents classes about how to parent children with developmental disabilities in order to increase self-efficacy in regards to parenting their child with ASD
- Provide support groups for military parents of children with ASD to share experiences and meet others with similar struggles

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend education for professionals who work with military families regarding how to best support families who have a child with ASD
- Support programs that teach military parents about available resources for children with developmental disabilities and how to advocate for those resources

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METHODS

- Biological mothers who were primary caregivers to a first-born child diagnosed with ASD two to five years previously were recruited via mailed letters with a 41% response rate.
- Mothers were interviewed regarding their experience of their child being diagnosed with ASD, original family plan, process of adaptation to the diagnosis, and future family planning process.
- Mothers' descriptions of their experiences were coded for themes and key concepts.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 22 mothers of children 48-84 months of age diagnosed with ASD.
- All mothers in the sample had initially planned to have two or more children.
- All mothers had some education after high school, most lived with the first-born child's father (82%), and some reported identifying as a minority race/ethnicity (36%).
- At the time of the interview, mothers either had only the child with ASD (32%), one additional child (59%), or an additional set of twins (10%); no other demographic data were provided.

LIMITATIONS

- Interviews were retrospective, potentially biasing mothers' reported experiences.
- Only mothers were included, and results may not generalize to fathers of children with ASD.
- Because mothers who did or did not decide to have additional children were not compared statistically, researchers' subjectivity may have influenced results of the comparison.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Statistically compare adjustment and well-being of a larger sample of parents who do and do not decide to have additional children after having a child diagnosed with ASD
- Examine differences in family planning processes when the number of children initially desired and the birth order of the child diagnosed with ASD varies
- Investigate the changes in adjustment and family planning of mothers and fathers across time after having a child diagnosed with ASD

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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